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The Epistle From the Yearly Meeting, London, 1867

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John Charles Newman.

THE EPISTLE

FROM THE

YEARLY MEETING,

HELD IN

LONDON,

BY ADJOURNMENTS FROM THE 22ND OF THE FIFTH MONTH, TO THE 31ST OF
THE SAME, INCLUSIVE,

1867;

TO

THE QUARTERLY AND MONTHLY MEETINGS OF FRIENDS IN GREAT BRITAIN
IRELAND, AND ELSEWHERE.

DUBLIN :

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EPISTLE.

DEAR FRIENDS,

We have been reminded, in this our solemn assembly, that one is our Master even Christ, and all we are brethren.* In some sense of the blessedness of this relationship, we offer the word of salutation; "Grace be with you, mercy and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love."†

Our meeting has been large, and we may thankfully acknowledge that, whilst our deliberations have been conducted in brotherly freedom, they have been crowned with love. The epistles from our dear friends in Ireland and America have been very acceptable to us. We rejoice in the evidence furnished by these epistles, and other sources, of the continued concern of our dear brethren in America for the religious wel-

* Mat. xxiii. 8.

† 2 John i. 3.

fare, both of their own members and of others around them; and of their self-denying exertions for the improvement of the coloured population.

The intended establishment of a Yearly Meeting in Canada has awakened our lively interest. Previously to the step thus contemplated, four Yearly Meetings had been settled, within the present century, west of the Alleghany Mountains. We trust that the increase of independent Yearly Meetings may in no wise interfere with that bond of fellowship which ought to distinguish the same family of churches, but that, in mutual dependence upon the One Head, all may be preserved, in love to Him and one to another, in the unity of the one faith.

Numerous and instructive memorials of deceased Friends have been presented to this meeting. In very different spheres in life, and endowed with very different mental and spiritual gifts, their lives have variously illustrated the riches of the manifold grace of God. In submission to the yoke of Christ, they were trained for His service, and taught the lessons of His love.

Christ crucified, risen, and glorified, is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, of each successive dispensation of Divine mercy and love to fallen man. He who "is the propitiation for our sins,"* is, through the operation of a living faith, to be made unto us of God, sanctification and redemption.†

* 1 John ii. 2.

† 1 Cor. i. 30.

The mercy that pardons is not to be severed from the holiness which abides unchangeable in Him.

Holiness is the fruit and the evidence of the Christian's faith. Without it, we are assured, "no man shall see the Lord."* Press after it, dear friends, we entreat you. Count all crosses and trials as a hallowed discipline whereby your Father in heaven is giving you to know His chastening love. The work of sanctification is manifested in the overcoming of the pride of the human heart; in the removal of those tendencies and habits which sin has induced, and in the strengthening of that renewed nature which lives and breathes by faith in the Son of God. The disciple of Christ has within him a love which works allegiance to his Lord in all the circumstances in which he may be placed. He will accept the engagements, and even the tribulations, of life, as so many opportunities for the exercise of christian fortitude and hope. "In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God," he will have his conversation in the world;† and in proportion as this is his experience, the joy of the Lord will be his strength and remain in him as a foretaste of that joy in which he shall be satisfied for ever.

We turn, in the constraining love of Christ, to such as have not yet known repentance unto salvation. Remember, we entreat you, that the God of all grace "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent,

* Heb. xii 14.

† 2 Cor. i. 12.

because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth ; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."† In enforcing the great truth of the resurrection and the day of judgment, our Lord represents Himself as the Son of Man, sitting upon the throne of his glory, pronouncing the final woe upon the slothful and impenitent, in solemn contrast with that life eternal which is the crowning gift of his grace, to the believing and faithful.‡ In view of the great realities thus set before us by the Saviour himself, shall any still delay to accept the offers of His mercy ? He who now pleads with you, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die ?"§ will be your Judge. O ! that your ears may be opened to hear the voice of the Son of God, that so you may have part in that blessed experience described by the Apostle, "Our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ ; who shall change our vile body, that it may

* Acts xvii. 30. † John v. 26, 29. ‡ Matt. xxv. 31. § Eek. xxxiii. 11.

be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."*

We are earnest in our desires that all our meetings for worship may be a living testimony to Christ, as the High Priest and Mediator, the Shepherd and Bishop of souls. He hath opened the fountain for sin ;† all may wash and be clean. The confession of the penitent, the breathing of the humble, the prayer of the contrite, the melody of the heart attuned to praise, are not restricted to vocal utterances, or dependent upon an outward service, but, offered in the hallowed name of Jesus, will arise with acceptance before the Throne. Whilst thankful for the true ministry of the word, prize, dear friends, the silence of your religious meetings ; affording, as it does, an opportunity for united approach unto the Father in the name of Jesus. Be fervent in spirit when you so meet. Seek after an humble, dependent, prayerful frame of mind, and to know the good Shepherd himself, by his Spirit, to feed you ; being assured that no outward ordinance or service can satisfy the need of your immortal souls. Experiencing yourselves the blessedness of this worship, be encouraged to speak of it one to another, and to invite others to the enjoyment of the same privilege.

To commune with our own heart, and to seek communion with our God, is essential to the maintenance

* Phil. iii. 20, 21.

† Zech. xiii. 1.

of the Divine life in the soul. Let no engagements, whether of business or philanthropy, be suffered to crowd out this great duty. The Lord Jesus hath, in this also, condescended to leave us an example that we should follow His steps. He "went about doing good,"* yet often retired from the multitudes that thronged Him, and prayed. His words are of universal application, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."†

We observe with thankfulness the increased interest taken by many of our friends in the welfare of those around them, and in plans for their religious improvement. May all who are thus engaged keep near to their blessed Saviour, with a single eye to His glory, looking to Him for guidance and for the renewal of their strength; that they may have a part in that exceeding great reward which is reserved, in His unmerited love, for them that labour and faint not.

There are many tribes in the Lord's spiritual Israel. May He bless all, in every place, that love His name. Yet we desire for our members individually that they may also realise their privileges and duties in connection with their own Society. We believe that there are many who, whilst cordially accepting that large basis of truth common to all sincere followers of Christ, are becoming increasingly convinced of the value of our own special testimonies,—on the immediate teaching and guidance of the

* Acts x. 38.

† Matt. xxvi. 41.

Holy Spirit ; on worship ; on the necessity of the renewed qualification for the preaching of the Gospel, and on its free exercise ; on the ministry of women ; on oaths and war ; and on other kindred subjects ; and who are sensible that these testimonies not only warrant, but require, that we should maintain our stand as a distinct religious community. To them we would say, in loving earnestness,—Be faithful to your convictions. Give due place to the claims of that body with which you are, in the providence of God, connected. Be decided for Christ. Yield Him your love and allegiance, in that portion of His church in which He has been pleased to place you, and in which you have so ample an opportunity for serving your Lord. In the Christian liberty which you there enjoy, large is the scope for the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. The principles which we profess, eminently encourage and require a life of self-denial and devotedness to God. And we would affectionately invite all, seriously to consider in what other course the religious character is likely to ripen to a fuller maturity than that into which those principles, when faithfully practised, necessarily lead ; in which the Lord Jesus is glorified in all His offices, and the soul is brought into subjection to the government of His Spirit.

We deplore the increasing adoption of rites and ceremonies in some of the professing churches around us, and of the lamentable extent to which a reliance

upon them has been substituted for the simple, spiritual worship which our Saviour enjoined. The ceremonial law had an important place in the Divine economy, as typical of the glorious realities of the Gospel. But it was confined to the one chosen people. It was not designed to embrace the world. It was ended in Him in whom it was fulfilled. The one sacrifice has been offered, once for all. The worship under the new and everlasting covenant has been set up,—the worship not of types, of ritual or of form, but in spirit and in truth. The priesthood of Aaron is passed away. The High Priest, who continueth ever, has entered into the holy places not made with hands, “now to appear in the presence of God for us.”* To Him, as Head over all things, is given all power in heaven and in earth.† Through Him alone we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.‡ By the same eternal Spirit, He manifests His abiding presence with His church. No tribe or family, no class or order of men, has now exclusive privileges in the things of God. The testimony of the Apostles assures us that all the members of the church, redeemed with the blood of the Lamb,§ are consecrated as priests unto God, to offer up not material but spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.¶ The service of the new covenant is a heart-service, not to be per-

* Heb. ix. 24.

† Mat. xxviii. 18.

‡ Ep. ii. 18.

§ Rev. v. 9, 10.

¶ 1 Pet. ii. 5; Rom. xii. 1.

formed by proxy, one for another. And if the mediation of a human priesthood be done away in Him who is the one Mediator, rites and ceremonies can avail nothing in aid of His all-sufficient work. O! that all who bear the name of Christ, were prepared, in subjection to the government of His Spirit, to accept and maintain the true liberty of the children of God.

Beloved Friends! let the truth as it is in Jesus, in its fulness and simplicity, be increasingly dear to you. To whom much has been given, of them, in the great day of final account, will much be required. Prize your many privileges. Be faithful and steadfast in your testimony to your Lord and Master. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."* And may "the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."†

Signed in and on behalf of the Meeting,

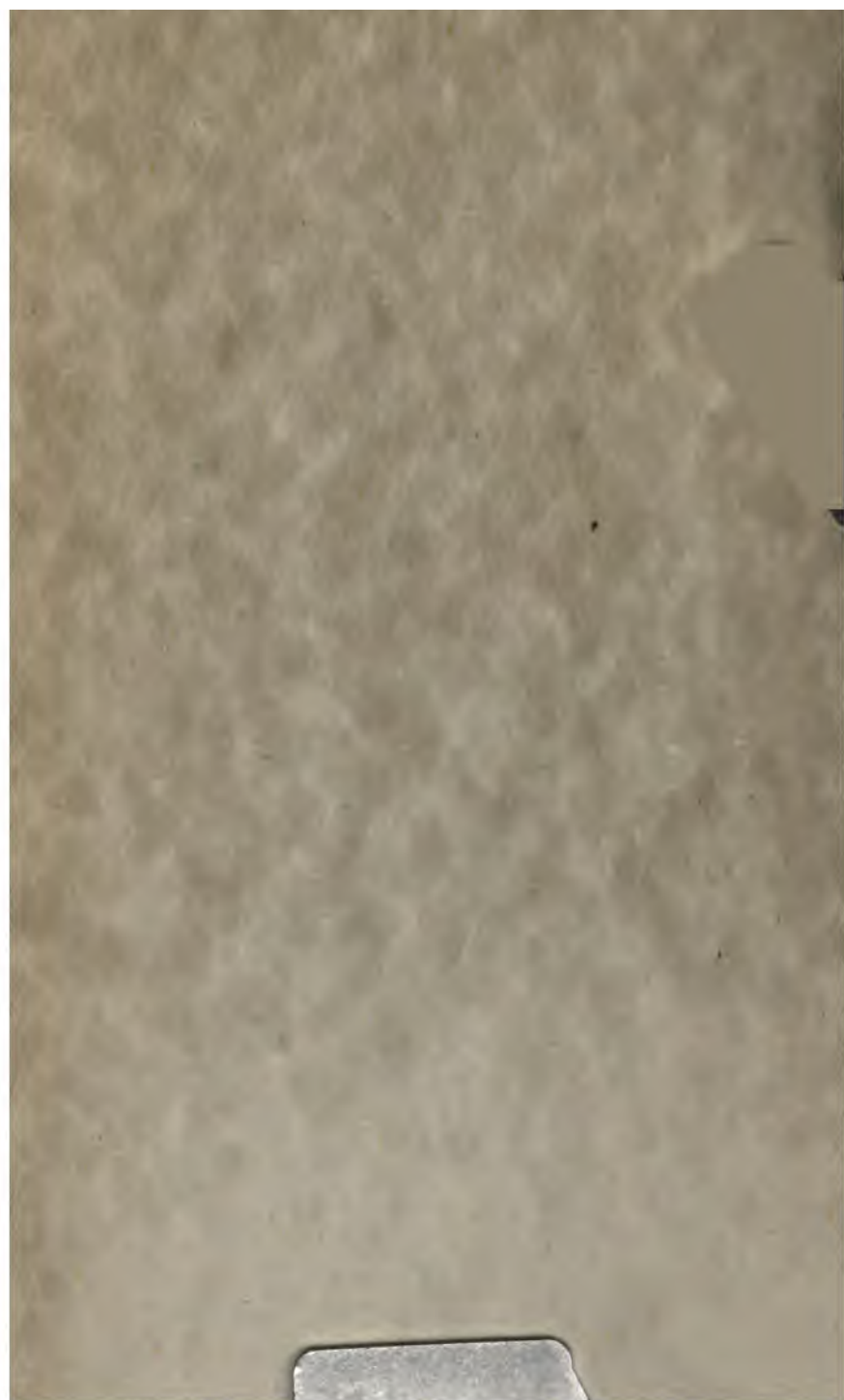
JOSEPH CROSFIELD,

Clerk to the Meeting this year.

* 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

† Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

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